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An Historical Sketch

OF

CHESTER TOWNSHIP,

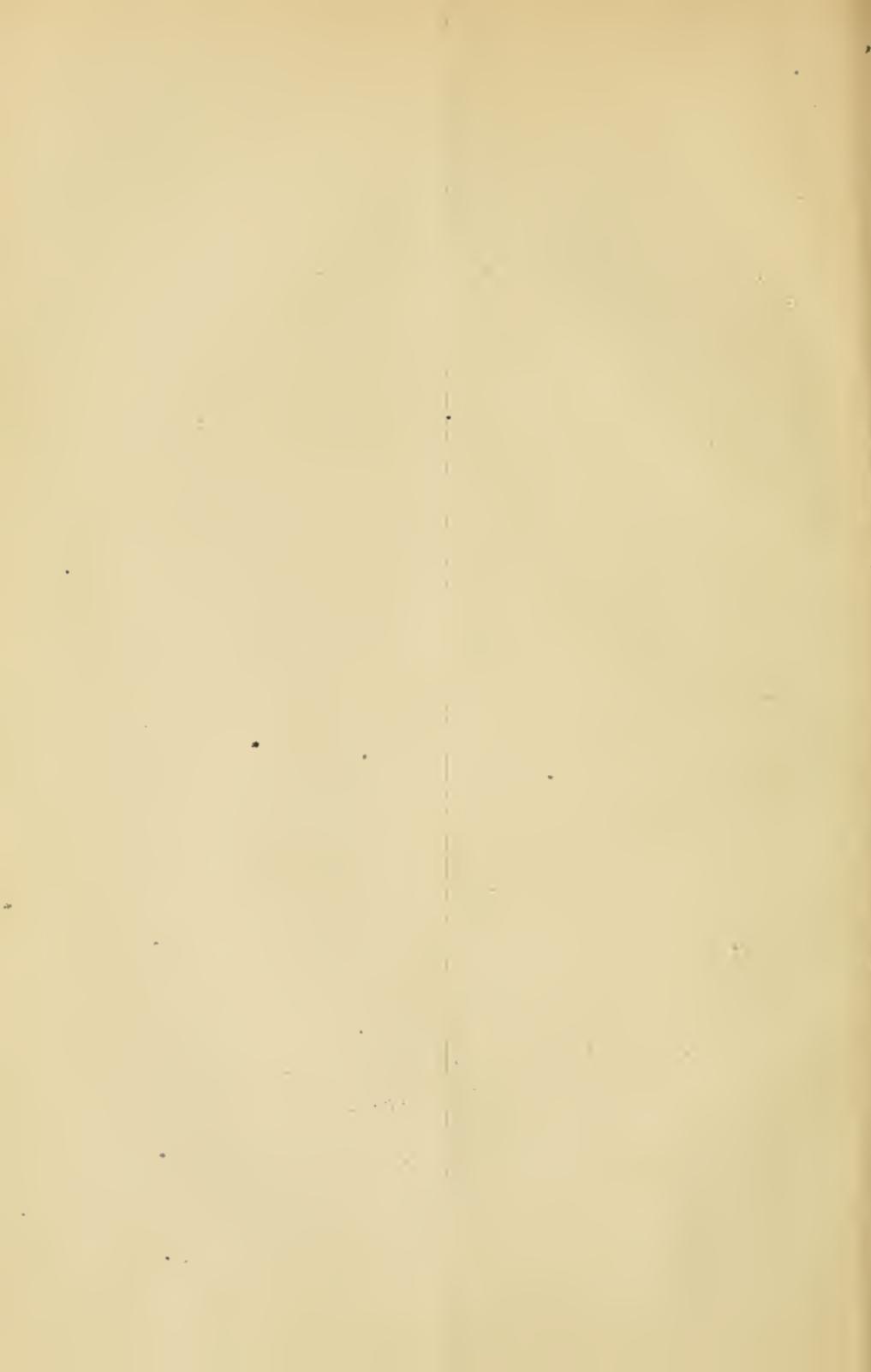
POWESHIEK COUNTY, IOWA,

READ AT THE



Quarter-Centennial, July 4th, 1881,

BY G. H. WHITE.



AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

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GRINNELL, IOWA :
CRAVATH & SHAW, STEAM PRINTERS.
1881.

NOTE.

The year 1881 being the twenty-fifth year of the settlement of CHESTER TOWNSHIP, Poweshiek County, Iowa, its citizens observed the Fourth of July as a Quarter-Centennial. The place of meeting was Henry Sherman's grove. The day was charming. Large numbers were present, including many from Grinnell. Charles Fisher, one of the Trustees of the Township, presided, and Thomas Fuller, the Clerk of the Township, acted as Secretary. After prayer by Rev. D. B. Davidson, Mr. Fisher, in a few fitting words, welcomed the people to Chester. Miss Fanny H. Sherman, the oldest living person born in the township, read the Declaration of Independence. An Historical Sketch of the Township was read by Rev. G. H. White, and brief addresses were made by Rev. J. G. Barton, Rev. D. B. Davidson, and D. F. Hays. The exercises were enlivened by music by the Chester Band, a medley by a male quartette, and "old-time music" on the violin by C. Skiff, and on the fife by J. Holmes. A most sumptuous dinner, such as the Chester ladies know so well how to prepare, was then served. The one only drawback to the pleasure of the day was the thought of our honored President, stricken down by the hand of the assassin. In order to place on record facts, the memory of which would otherwise soon fade out, the following sketch is printed.

LETTER FROM HON. J. B. GRINNELL.

GRINNELL, IOWA, July 5th, 1881.

REV. G. H. WHITE, CHESTER:

My Dear Sir:— You know why I could not be at your Quarter-Centennial Celebration. It was a sad day, and on any other occasion I could have added little to your history—so true, in fine taste, and with elegant delineation. CHESTER forever! The township where the lamented Horace Greeley found the wide corn-fields, yielding one hundred bushels to the acre; noted for good roads, and live farmers, and intelligent stock-raisers; sagacious in keeping out of courts of law, and with no saloons, no candidates for jail or poor-house. You are giving a larger per cent. of your youth a college education than any town in Iowa, and enjoy a like pre-eminence in church-going and benevolent contributions; with many other solid but modest virtues, which give you rank as the model and eminent rural town of this pround commonwealth.

Yours,

J. B. GRINNELL.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF CHESTER TOWNSHIP.

Twenty-six years ago to-day, when the pealing of bells and the booming of cannon ushered in the Fourth of July, 1855, this township of Chester was unknown. Not a tree had been planted, not a rod of fence had been built, not a road laid out. There was simply the rolling prairie, on which, year by year, the flowers bloomed and faded, the grass waved and withered, and the birds sang, as they had for a thousand years before. But that summer the extension of the Rock Island Railroad into Iowa gave a new impulse to immigration, and the busy, enterprising hand of man was laid on the prairies of Chester. The sod was turned, and corn rustled and grain waved where before had grown only the rank grass. Houses were erected, roads laid out, bridges built, groves planted, school-houses and churches put up, and now, after the elapse of twenty-five years, here we are to-day in this beautiful grove, to acknowledge the good hand of our God upon us. Certainly it is very fitting, at the end of a quarter of a century, that we assemble on this anniversary day, and trace the way by which God hath led us.

In the autumn of 1854, William Sherman and Stillman Stockwell, both formerly of Croydon, New Hampshire, but then residing in Lyons, Iowa, were called upon by their friend, the Rev. Job Cushman, who spoke in glowing terms of the beautiful prairies lying north of the new town of Grinnell, and on Mr. Cushman's representations they purchased eight hundred acres in what is now Chester Township. In December, 1854, Mr. Sherman came to inspect the land he had purchased, and was so pleased with the situation that he purchased a thousand acres more, and made arrangements with Henry Lawrence, Esq., of Grinnell, to have a few acres broken. The following spring, that is, in the spring of 1855, Mr. Lawrence had ten acres of land broken. This breaking was a little south of where Jason Sherman's house now stands. The work was done by W. L. Carleton, a Campbellite minister. Mr. Jehu Hayes, now of Rockwell, in Calhoun County, about the same time turned a few furrows for planting locust trees, both on his own quarter and

on the quarter west of Jason Sherman's home quarter, then owned by a Mr. Thomas, now residing in Newton. The same spring Mr. Lawrence had a shanty, sixteen by eighteen feet, put up for the breakers to live in. This was the first house put up in Chester of which we have any certain knowledge, and is now used by Mr. Sherman as a granary. There is a tradition, also, that in a little grove a short distance below the Seymore Grove, the early settlers found the remains of a cabin which once had been used by counterfeitors; but of this we have no certain information.

In the summer of 1856, that is, twenty-five years ago this summer, Mr. Sherman's shanty was occupied by two men named Atwood and Rich, of Cape Cod, Mass., and familiarly known as "the Cape Cod boys." They raised the first crop of corn ever raised in Chester, on the aforesaid ten acres of Mr. Sherman's. These Cape Cod boys brought with them water-lily bulbs and pine seeds from the Cape; and the beautiful water-lilies now growing in Bear Creek, and the pine trees on the premises of Henry and Jason Sherman and Albert Williams are from the seed brought by them from Cape Cod. Atwood and Rich, in the autumn of 1856, built a shanty near Mr. Bigelow's residence, but after remaining in it a little while they returned East.

In the summer of 1856 a shanty was also put up on the Munson farm, then owned by a military officer named Campbell, of Poughkeepsie, N. Y., and occupied till winter by George Farnham and his father and mother. These were the first three shanties put up in Chester: Jason Sherman's, in the spring of 1855; Mr. Campbell's, on the Munson farm, in the summer of 1856, and the Cape Cod boys' shanty in the autumn of 1856.

About Sept. 1, 1856, Jason W. Sherman and his wife moved into Chester, and occupied the shanty before spoken of while building their present home. That fall that little shanty teemed with life. It contained Mr. and Mrs. Jason Sherman, Mr. and Mrs. Newton Sherman, Henry Sherman, Harrison Wheelock, and at times two or three visitors and workmen. And as into Paradise of old the serpent entered, so into this little paradise the snakes would enter by crawling through the floor, their glittering eyes peering over the edge of the table, and anxiously inspecting the quality of the food which these new comers to this prairie had brought. A little later in the fall that shanty witnessed an experience of a different kind. One November night a heavy snow storm fell, and the next morning twelve baskets of snow were carried out before breakfast could be prepared. The frame and common lumber of Mr. Sherman's house were brought from Indian Town, but the doors, windows, nails and finishing lumber were brought from Iowa City. The carpentering work was done by H. W. Wheelock. That first winter Mr. Sherman's family was the only family in the township.

May 18, 1857, Henry Sherman with his bride, fresh from the hills of Newport, N. H., joined his brother, and began building his present home. Much of its material was hauled from Iowa City. That summer these two families, the only ones in the township, both occupied Jason Sherman's house. Having with them a certain celebrated builder named Kellogg, from Grinnell, engaged with his workmen in finishing the house, the ladies did not wish that that first Fourth of July in the township should pass unnoticed. So they procured large quantities of roses and wild flowers, with which they adorned the unplastered walls, and prepared as good a dinner as the conveniences of that early day would allow. But, much to their regret, the carpenters were so anxious to spend the afternoon in Grinnell that they hurriedly swallowed their dinner and started off, without once acknowledging the elaborate decorations and sumptuous viands, prepared for their benefit! Only another instance of woman's unappreciated work!

In the spring of 1858, the infant settlement received a strong acquisition in the persons of Joseph and John Hays with their families, from Maryland. These two venerable men and their sister, Aunt Betsey, now 81, are still with us. For many years may they be yet spared to us. Their sons, Daniel F., and Joseph T., and Thomas, and William M., and Joseph B., and their daughter, Mrs. S. G. Page, have rendered invaluable service in every noble and praiseworthy work. As far as we know Mr. John Hays was the first person, of those now residing in the township, to visit these prairies. He was here in the summer of 1854.

The year 1859 brought in Cornelius Skiff, Abram Hayes, Salvador Hayes, Wilson Sherman, S. G. Page, and Samuel Hayes. The year 1860 brought in Charles and Edward Fisher, who settled first on what is now known as the Carmichael farm. 1861 brought in John Lightner, and 1862 the Stockwells, and Albert Williams, and soon after came the Wheelocks, the Rutherfords, the Rickards, the Fullers, the Shackleys and Bigelows. In later years came the Parrishes, the Sanders Bros., A. R. Heald, Wm. Sherman, R. W. Clarke, who ever since have been closely identified with the best interests of the township. Since then, one by one, families have moved in, until now the entire township is settled, and almost every acre of land is under cultivation. The population—according to the last census—was 623.

Little do we, who have come in later, know of the privations and toils those early settlers experienced; the long rides in blinding snow storms, over pathless prairies, with no house within miles; the plunging with loaded teams through creeks and sloughs; the fires sweeping across the prairies, threatening to burn up the little home and its surroundings; the wearing loneliness, consequent upon the isolated life on the prairies, a loneliness sometimes deep-

ened into fear by the howling of the wolves around the house; the long weeks of wasting sickness, far away from the loved and dear; the dying hour of the wife or little child, and the tearful burial upon the lonely prairie. We who have come later can never know of those privations. And, herein is that saying true, "One soweth and another reapeth," others have labored and we are entered into their labors.

One of those early incidents might be called Chester's first experience with the tramp. In the spring of '58, Mrs. Jason Sherman was spending the day with Mrs. Henry Sherman, their husbands having gone some miles to work. They observed a man with a club in his hands coming toward the house. He was an Irishman, and of a powerful frame. The ladies hurriedly bolted the doors and windows, and retreated upstairs. The man shook the doors and windows violently, endeavoring to force an entrance but failed. He then braced himself against a window, trying to break it in, when Mrs. Henry Sherman appeared at the window with a loaded gun, and told him if he did not desist she would shoot. The man dropped on his knees in mortal terror, crossing himself and calling upon the saints and virgin, and pleading for mercy. He said he was hungry and wanted bread. Mrs. Sherman, with the gun in one hand, and a loaf in the other, went out, compelled him to sit down on a bench while he ate the bread, and then to go away. So unruly, however, was the man afterwards, that he was whipped out of the township by Jason Sherman.

The township was formally organized Oct. 22, 1860, and the first election held in the house of Henry Sherman. Thirteen persons exercised the right of franchise at that election, viz: J. Hays, D. F. Hays, J. A. Hays, J. T. Hays W. M. Hays, Samuel Hays, Abram W. Hays, S. G. Page, J. W. Sherman, Henry Sherman, Wilson Sherman, Cornelius Skiff and H. P. Strain. Cornelius Skiff was elected the first Township Clerk, W. M. Hays, Assessor, and Wilson Sherman, D. F. Hays, and J. Hays, Trustees.

The Township was named Chester, after Chester, Vermont, the home of the Fisher Brothers. The name Chester, comes from an old Latin word signifying a camp. When the Romans conquered England, they built a very strong citadel thirteen miles from Liverpool, and called it "Devana Castra." The Saxons called it "Caestre," and afterwards "Chester." It is one of the most celebrated places in England, and probably from it descended the name of all the modern Chesters. In the Anglo-Saxon language Chester signified a city; so in the strict meaning of the word, all our township is a city.

In the fall of 1860 nearly the entire population of the township rode in a large wagon to Toledo, to hear Gov. Kirkwood speak. The flag which floated

over them that autumn day, like our glorious Union, is still preserved, and after twenty years, is floating over us to-day.

The first child born in the township was Sarah Francella Sherman, a daughter of Jason W. Sherman, and was born Nov. 19th, 1857. She lived about six years.

The oldest living person born in the township, is Miss Fanny Sherman, a daughter of Henry Sherman, born June 10th, 1859. The first male child born in the township is Milton Skiff, born Oct. 22, 1859. The youngest child, at the expiration of this quarter of a century, we believe is Maud Sellers.

The first death in the township was that of Miss Deborah Hays, a young lady twenty-two years of age, and a daughter of Joseph Hays. She died Dec. 2, 1859, of cerebro spinal meningitis, and was buried in Grinnell.

The first burial in the cemetery was that of Harry Stockwell, a son, of B. F. Stockwell, aged four years, who was run over by a loaded wagon. He died Sept. 9th, 1864. The same week two other children died and were buried—in the cemetery—viz. Sept. 14, Willie Fisher, a son of Charles Fisher, aged four months, and Sept. 15, Elmer Sherman, a son of Henry Sherman, aged two years.

The number of graves now in the cemetery is about seventy, mostly of women and children. It is a remarkable fact that during the first sixteen years of the township, only *one man* died, and he was an invalid, who came to visit his brother and died while in the township. Such another instance can hardly be found in the land; a township settled for sixteen years, and not a young man nor an old man dying in all these years. Elmer Potter, a young man of some promise, was drowned while bathing in Bear Creek, July 1876.

The first marriage was that of Mr. Frank Burleigh and Miss Mary Thompson, Nov., '63, at the residence of Wm. Thompson. Jehu A. Hayes and Miss Caroline Maltbie, then residents of the township, were married in September previous; but as they went to Grinnell and were married by Rev. L. C. Rouse, they failed of having the first wedding in the township.

The first school in the township was taught by Miss Jennie Howard, in the spring of '62, in a house built by Sam'l Hays, but then unoccupied. This house stood about 40 rods, directly north of the north-east corner of Henry Sherman's farm—some forty rods south of Abner Wood's house. Some of the scholars in that first school were Frances Williams, now Mrs. W. M. Hays; Mary Hays, now Mrs. Salvador Hays of Nebraska; Thomas Hays; Joseph B. Hays; Belle, Nellie and Frank Skiff; Eddie Sherman and two Holliday children.

The first school-house, now known as No. 2, was built in the summer of

1862. The township now contains nine school-houses; and about twenty-five hundred dollars per year is expended on the schools.

The first religious service held in the township was at the house of J. W. Sherman, July 18, 1858, when the Rev. Job Cushman preached to an audience of fifteen persons. In the summer of '62 a Sunday School and Prayer Meeting were organized in the Samuel Hays house, and on the erection of the first school-house the Sunday School and Prayer Meetings were transferred there. The numbers and interest increasing, the services of L. C. Rouse, of Grinnell, were secured, and he preached during the summers of '63—4. June 15, 1865, the first Congregational Church was organized with sixteen members, Pres. Magoun preaching the sermon. Prof. Buck was then employed to preach, and the congregation outgrowing the limits of the school-house, the present Congregational Church edifice was erected in 1868, at a cost of three thousand dollars.

The ministers of this Church have been Prof. S. J. Buck, Prof. C. W. Clapp, Pres. G. F. Magoun, and G. H. White. The present membership is about one hundred and fifty. The Sabbath School averages an attendance of one hundred. W. J. Rutherford is the present Superintendent. A Parsonage was put up adjacent to the Church building in 1874, at a cost of \$1,500.00, and furnishes an excellent residence for the Pastor.

The M. E. Church was organized March 18, 1867, by Rev. D. Murphy, of Grinnell. For some years the services were held in the school-house and private dwellings, but in 1874 their present edifice was erected at a cost of \$3,400.00. Its pastors have been Revs. Dennis Murphy, J. D. De Tarr, Dr. L. N. Busby, James M. Coates, J. E. Corley, W. H. Honn, E. P. Michener, J. W. Robinson, J. B. Brown, E. L. Briggs, O. Cessna, W. F. Cowles, R. Neilson, S. R. Ferguson, and J. G. Barton. The Sabbath School averages an attendance of 75 scholars. J. W. Harpster is Superintendent.

The Chester Library Association was organized in February, 1877, and contains one hundred and sixty standard volumes.

Two Postoffices exist in the township—"Chester Center," established in '77, and of which C. B. Smith has been Postmaster since its organization, and "Sonora," founded in 1878, of which H. James is Postmaster. There is also one store and one Cheese Factory, both under the care of C. B. Smith. About 40,000 pounds of cheese are made annually, of a deservedly high reputation.

On the breaking out of the Rebellion, in 1861, Chester was thoroughly loyal to the Union, and great interest was felt in the success of the Union arms. Out of the families then in the township—numbering hardly over a dozen—eleven men enlisted, viz: W. M. Hayes, Walter P. Blanchard, Hugh P. Strain, Adam Spade, Salvador Hays, Edward Fisher, Daniel F. Hays, Leonard Wil-

muth, S. C. Carter, Samuel Thompson, and W. R. Look. Arthur Manfield, of Highland Township, was also employed by this township as a substitute. These eleven men from Chester rendered very efficient service in the war for the Union. W. M. Hayes, Blanchard, Spade, and Wilmuth were in the service, each nearly four years, and did not leave it till the war was ended. W. M. Hayes was in nineteen battles and twenty-one skirmishes, and did not receive a scratch. Edward Fisher's death was undoubtedly hastened by the injury his constitution received in the cavalry. Samuel Thompson died in the service, and lies buried near Gravelly Springs, Ala. D. F. Hays was in the army two years and nine months. Eighteen years ago to-day, when the 4th of July, 1863, was celebrated by Vicksburg surrendering to Gen. Grant, and when the shout of victory—a shout like the roar of many waters—went up from 100,000 men, C. B. Smith, D. F. Hays, and W. M. Hays, of Chester, joined in that shout. The following persons, now residents of Chester, were also in the army: H. T. Wheelock, A. J. Morford, W. C. Hafkey, C. B. Smith, J. Holmes, C. Lord, T. Fuller, R. Wescoe, R. Marsh, Howard Morris, A. Armstrong, Henry Schraeder, Leroy Forehand, W. J. Rutherford and J. B. Hanson. At the time of the celebrated "Blue Point War," below Grinnell, but one man remained in the township.

This sketch would not be complete without a remembrance of the departed, some of whom rendered such efficient service in the early days of the township. Among these are Mrs. Angenette Sherman, wife of Jason W. Sherman; Mrs. Sophronia A. Sherman, wife of Wilson Sherman; Mrs. Sarah Hays, Mrs. C. Skiff, Edward Fisher, Mrs. William Thompson, Mrs. Mahala Sherman, Alvin Rickard, Mrs. Frank Burleigh, Mrs. E. Cocking, Mr. and Mrs. Clay, Mr. Edelblute, Mr. Johnston, and Mr. Childs. Over their graves, on this anniversary day, we drop the tears of affection, and wreath afresh their tombs with the flowers of our loving remembrance.

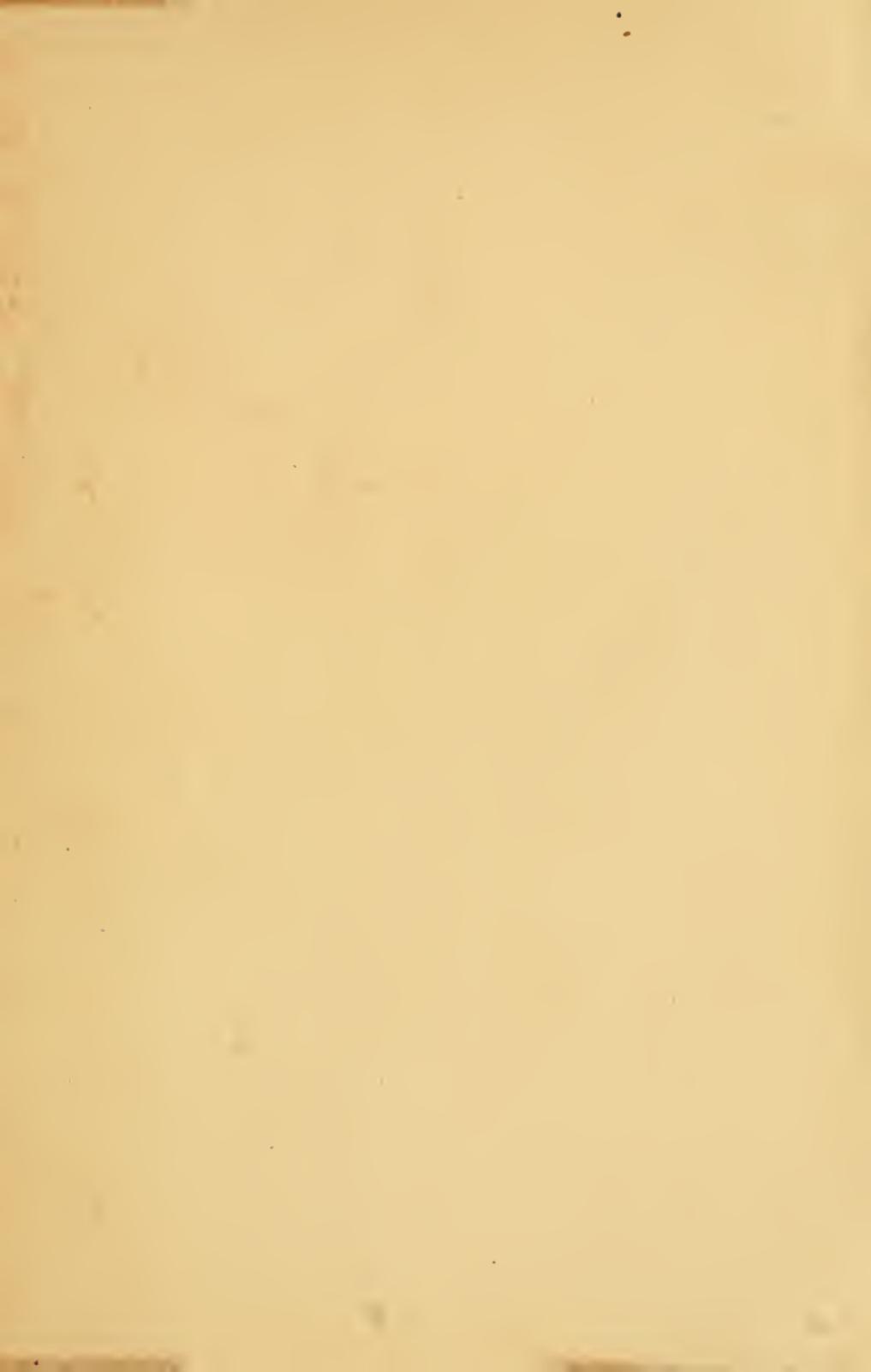
And so, after twenty-five years of toil, here we are to-day to thank God for the kind hand with which He has blessed Chester. Truly, He has given to us a goodly heritage. And as we look to-day upon these fertile farms, these pleasant homes, these beautiful groves, these school-houses and churches, this happy people, ought we not to sing, "Praise God, from Whom all Blessings flow?" There is hardly a township in the State with a better soil, with a more healthful climate, with better farms, or a better people. I have never lived in a community where there was so little of evil as in Chester. True, we cannot boast of a College, but we have twenty young men and young women who are making their way through college, and who rank high in their classes, and who ere long will be heard from on the great field of life. One of our number, Prof. Charles Davidson, is the founder and Principal of

Minneapolis Academy, an institution which has already gained an acknowledged place in that city; and one member of the Congregational Church, Miss Mary Pinkerton, has been laboring for seven years as a missionary in Southern Africa.

True, we have no Bank to boast of, but we have an untold amount of greenbacks—in the greenbacks of God's bank; in the greensward and growing grain and corn on twenty-two thousand acres.

True, we have no Lawyer nor Physician, and we can also gratefully add, we have no saloon and no drunkard in Chester. Our people are all engaged in a vocation that will be needed as long as the earth stands. When that golden age comes, of which prophets have spoken and poets sung, there will be no longer any need of lawyers, for every one will do right. There may be no need of physicians, for all will obey the laws of nature. There may possibly be no need of teachers and preachers, for all will know the Lord. But while the world stands there will be need of the tiller of the soil—of the sturdy, honest farmer, to raise the wheat and corn for the sustenance of human life. And that Chester is not remiss in this, we may state that in the year 1879 she produced 259,295 bushels of corn, 58,716 bushels of oats, 17,162 bushels of wheat, 39,000 pounds of butter, 6,238 head of swine, while 800 head of horses performed the farm work, and 812 cows furnished milk. Her Holstein and Short-Horned cattle are known all over Central Iowa, and her fatted cattle attract attention in the Chicago markets.

And so at the end of our First Quarter of a Century, thankfully we raise here to-day our Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." But when the next quarter of a century has rolled around, and Chester celebrates her jubilee, how many of us here to-day will then be absent. Some of us perhaps in other places, some in that city whose builder and maker is God. Said an Iowa statesman at the Centennial, "But while America exhibits to the Monarchies of the old world her stately jewels, she points with pride and says this, the center of my diadem, is Iowa." And may we add, while Iowa exhibits to her sister states her children, may she never blush to say, this, one of my noblest and truest, is Chester.



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